

## BOOK REVIEW

George Ordish. *The Year of the Ant*. 139 p. 1978. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York. \$9.95.

This is a delightful description of the ants and their social system, explaining their role in the ecosystem and their ability to survive for millions of years. The explanation of the system, that was able to overcome potential disasters, such as fire, floods, DDT and dependence on slavery and drug addiction, is masterfully presented and of interest not only to the expert myrmecologist, but also to the layman. The author writes with an appealing sense of humor that pervades this volume and provides a real treat. Ants, as well as other social insects, have fascinated man since biblical time. Ants probably originated in North America wherefrom they spread to South America and to Eurasia over the land bridges that once connected the continents. The ant colony is often described as a successful Marxist system, in which each ant gives according to its ability and receives according to its need. However, ants in a colony are not merely part of an automatic machine. There is some free will, as ants enjoy some leisure, such as occasional sunning. Individual ants are capable of learning, and they make choices. The very limited scale of such activities can easily be overridden by the need of the colony and control is exercised by chemical secretions. The author describes this with scientific accuracy by presenting the life cycle of an individual wood ant of a colony. The story begins in March and the star performer is from a monogynous nest, situated in the woods in a clearing in the Adirondack Mountains. Nearby is another, older nest that is polygynous. The behavior of ants in both nests, their contact with aphids, care of eggs, dangerous mites and even more dangerous staphylinid beetle invasions that result in drug addiction, the emergence of males and mating, robber ants, loss of the queen and transformation of the worker into a queen, and finally the fight with another queen and the decapitation of the "heroine" are chronologically presented, from March till October of "the year of the ant." The chapters are aptly illustrated by Clarke Hutton. There is a bibliography of books and original articles and a subject index.

This book can be read profitably not only as an introduction to social insects, but also by the specialist. The book can be recommended to students, teachers, and research scientists, as well as for general academic libraries, public libraries and high schools. The good quality of the print and paper in a book costing less than \$10.00 might also be mentioned. In short, the author succeeded in providing a book not only for entomologists but

also for a more general audience, that merits reading by all interested in biology. Several copies should be made available in the libraries of high schools and academic institutions.

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### BOOK REVIEW

*Tabanini of Thailand above the Isthmus of Kra (Diptera: Tabanidae)*. John J. S. Burton. 165 pp. 1978. Entomological Reprint Specialists, Los Angeles, California. \$15.00.

Female Tabanini are well known blood suckers, whereas the males mostly feed upon honeydew and on juices of flowers. These flies play an important role in spreading agents of certain infectious diseases such as Surra to livestock—especially virulent in equine species. Tabanini also play a role in the spread of tularemia to man. The biological diversity and economic importance of gadflies has been the subject of many scientific papers. Although the oriental tabanid fauna is unusually rich, it remained the least known up to now. Therefore this excellent study is very important and it is useful not only insofar as the tabanid fauna of Thailand and southeast Asia is concerned, but also for the whole oriental zoogeographic region.

In twelve chapters the author presents detailed information about the economic importance of gadflies, collections made in Indochina, superspecific taxa of Tabanini with reference to Thailand, the species concept, field procedures, descriptions of species, and a key to females. The interesting and detailed study of the tribe Tabanini comprises 81 species, of which 31 are described as new and 24 nominal taxa are newly synonymized. For many species lectotypes are given and some new generic combinations are proposed. The study is illustrated with 80 excellent figures. The last chapter deals with other species involved or implicated in the transmission of disease agents in the Indochina area.

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